



AETC News Clips

Maxwell AFB, Ala.



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DAILY Photo by John Godbey

Dr. Greg Riddle, right, is turning over his 900 patients to Dr. Scott Anderson as he gives up private practice to enter the U.S. Air Force.

A doctor's major decision

He's swapping private practice for military life

By Paul Huggins
DAILY Staff Writer

phuggins@decaturdaily.com · 340-2395

When faced with a choice of a career in the military or being his own boss, Dr. Greg Riddle naturally chose the one with less rigid demands and more freedom to do what he's always wanted.

That's why he'll show up for training Sunday at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, leaving behind his 3-year-old medical practice as a Decatur family physician, including 900 patients.

In a nutshell, the change means Dr. Riddle will have more time to focus on medicine, venture into humanitarian work and start a family. It also realizes a dream he had as an ROTC student at Bob Jones High School in the 1980s.

"I've always been interested in the military," Dr. Riddle, 37, said. "In fact, I applied for West Point when I was in high school. But when I found out I would have to graduate in the top 2 percent of my class to qualify for medical school, I changed my mind. What I really wanted to do was to become a doctor and going to West Point would have made that very hard."

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Though he closed his office Dec. 23, he still has work to do before he embarks on his new career. The most pressing task is transferring medical documents of his patients to Dr. Scott Anderson, whom Dr. Riddle chose to care for his patients.

"We have a similar philosophy regarding medicine," Dr. Riddle said. "I'm more about developing relationships with my patients, which takes time. I'm less concerned with getting a large number of patients, and I really feel Dr. Anderson is the same way."

Dr. Anderson, 42, added, "I've read Dr. Riddle's notes and said to myself, 'That's what I would have done. That's what I would have done.' "

Adding Dr. Riddle's 900 patients doubles Dr. Anderson's clients, and the Michigan native who went to medical school at Duke University said the nearly 2,000 patients he will have are still a thousand short of the number he needs. They said that shows how difficult and demanding it is to build a medical practice as a solo doctor and why Dr. Riddle found the Air Force so attractive.

"I won't miss dealing with insurance companies and worrying about the business end of being a physician," Dr. Riddle said. "I'll get to practice medicine without having to worry about reimbursements.

"The opportunity to serve my country was very important," he said. "And in the Air Force, physicians also get to do a lot of humanitarian work. That's something I've always wanted to do, but you don't have much of a chance to do that in the private sector."

Another benefit, Dr. Riddle said, is that he and his wife, Suzanne, will have more time to work on building a family. Suzanne Riddle, who has been her husband's office manager and receptionist, won't have to work. Dr. Riddle also liked that the military counted his eight years of private practice as equal to military experience, so he will enter the Air Force as a major. The Air Force, which he said has a shortage of 20 family practice physicians, also allowed him to rank his top choices of where to serve.

His first choice was the Air Force Academy, but he's content with getting sent to his second choice of Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, home to one of the Air Force's largest base hospitals.

"I will have to move every four years, and I could get sent to Iraq, but I'm looking forward to the career opportunities I'll have," he said. "I could become a flight surgeon and take care of pilots. I could go into more of an administrative role. There's just so many different areas of medicine that you can go into."

He'll qualify for retirement in 20 years, and can end his military career at 57, still leaving good years to go back into private practice.

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The hardest part of his decision, he said, was leaving his hometown. He grew up in Madison, and his parents, sisters and in-laws all live in the Madison-Huntsville area. But now that Dr. Riddle has decided, he said he's eager to get to Montgomery.

Dr. Riddle took his military oath Dec. 21, presented by his high school ROTC instructor Col. Kenneth Pearce.

"That was a real thrill to have him there," Dr. Riddle said, explaining that Pearce's influence helped lead him to consider West Point and a military career 20 years ago. "I feel like I've come full circle."

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AETC News Clips

Keesler AFB, Miss.



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Coast Community Leaders Mingle With State Politicians

Some South Mississippi community leaders want to make sure their voices are heard. They boarded a bus bound for the state capital and Wednesday night's legislative reception.

Frank Wilkerson owns Lighthouse Tours. He says tourism on the Gulf Coast is making a comeback. His trip to Jackson was to ask the state legislature to help spread the word.

"More money is always good," said Wilkerson. "So basically more money supporting the Convention and Visitors Bureau down here. Basically publicizing where we are and letting the public know we're down here. We're recovering and getting well."

About 35 Biloxi Bay Chamber members boarded the bus. The seats were filled with business owners, bankers, military officials, and retirees all with their own message for the senators and representatives.

Biloxi Bay Chamber president Melissa Polk said, "Personally, I want to thank them for what I know it was a difficult decision for them, okaying on-shore gaming. I think that was very important. Several casinos are open now because of that."

While some travelers would strengthen old relationships others would forge new ones. Only two months on the job at Keesler Air Force Base, Brigadier General Paul Capasso saw an opportunity to introduce himself.

"I believe it's a great opportunity to meet the 2006 Mississippi legislators," he said. "Then to work with the folks on the bus, the Chamber, to look at opportunities and challenges to come up with some answers."

Members say the first Legislative Reception since Katrina will be different from years past.

"This year I don't think I'm going to go with the Legislative Reception asking for anything in particular," said Polk. "Sometimes I go with an agenda that I really want to ask for. This year I think everyone just wants to go and say 'thank you' for what they've been doing for the coast."



AETC News Clips

Tyndall AFB, Fla.



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Aztec suffers federal setback

‘Blacklisted’ disposal company barred by judge from receiving government contracts

By Anthony Cormier News Herald Writer 522-5134 / acormier@pcnh.com

TALLAHASSEE

A Bay County disposal company cannot earn federal contracts until the completion of a debarment process launched by the U.S. Air Force, a judge ruled last week.

Chief U.S. District Judge Robert L. Hinkle concluded Friday that Aztec Environmental Inc. — which sued the Air Force to halt the debarment — had not “demonstrated a substantial likelihood of prevailing on the merits of its claims” and should not earn government contracts until the end of the case.

Attorneys for Aztec and the Air Force could not be immediately reached for comment Wednesday.

Aztec and its subsidiaries are facing a contract blacklist after the Air Force alleged the company broke environmental, immigration and labor laws while removing asbestos at Hurlburt Field in Okaloosa County. The Air Force also accused Aztec of violating environmental regulations during waste-removal contracts at Tyndall Air Force Base.

According to federal law, placement on the list would exclude Aztec from receiving future federal contracts or subcontracts. Its existing contracts would not be affected.

The Air Force said Aztec improperly and deliberately removed debris containing regulated “friable asbestos” and falsely claimed the material had been transferred to a hazardous waste landfill. Aztec also knowingly hired illegal aliens to work on projects and submitted false Social Security numbers for 21 employees who were illegals, according to an Air Force memo.

The judge’s denial is a potentially devastating setback for the company, which claimed that without contract renewals it would lose \$2 million and possibly be forced to shutter its operations. According to documents filed in a Tallahassee court, attorneys claimed the company projected \$9 million in annual revenues and had received 89 military contracts and subcontracts since 2004.

After filing a federal lawsuit to halt the debarment process, Aztec attorneys argued two points: that the proposal “was arbitrary and capricious” and an “abuse of discretion.” The company then moved for an injunction that would allow Aztec to enter new contracts with the government.

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Hinkle wrote last week that Aztec “has not demonstrated a likelihood of success on either issue” in the lawsuit, and that the Air Force raised significant claims in its debarment memo.

“Here there is substantial evidence of serious misconduct,” Hinkle wrote, “by Aztec in the none-too-distant past. ... To be sure, Aztec has been awarded other government contracts since the alleged misconduct. But Aztec’s assertion that this proves its present responsibility is not correct.”

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